(d) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH): (a) to (d) A work of construction of railway bridge over river Ganga at Patna connecting Patna and Sonpur stations was included in the Budget 1996-97 with the proviso that the work would be taken up after receiving the requisite clearances. The proposed alignment is expected to pass via Dighaghat.

The detailed investigations and final location survey for construction of this rail bridge have been taken up by M/s RITES. Model studies are being done by Uttar Pradesh Irrigation Research Institute, Roorkee and affter their completion, the alignment and configuration of the bridge will get finalised. Once the design and alignment of the bridge is finalised, the cost estimates shall be firmed up and the proposal will be processed for requisite clearances. The work would be taken up after these clearances have been received. A provision of Rs. 5 cr. has been kept for this work in the Budget 2000-2001. No target date for completion of the project has yet been fixed.

Improvement of punctuality of north-east bound trains

2901. SHRI DIPANKAR MUKHERJEE: Will the Minister of RAILWAYS be pleased to refer to answer to Unstarred question 1821 given in the Rajya Sabha on 17th December, 1999 and state the action plan to reduce the enumerated Railway causes for improving the punctuality of North-East bound trains?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH): The following steps are being taken to reduce the Railway causes for improving the punctuality performance of North-East bound trains

1. Improvement in standards of maintenance to reduce equipment failures and to take remedial measures to avoid recurrence.

2. Provision of corridor blocks over Indian Railways to facilitate integrated maintenance schedule for tracks, over head equipment and signaling equipment to ensure proper maintenance and to avoid failures.

3. Augmenting line capacity to reduce congestion on the main route to Guwahati by converting the existing meter gauge to broad gauge.

4. Monitoring of trains on a real time basis, round-the-clock at all three tiers of administration i.e. Railway Board, Zonal & Divisional.

5. Drivers and other operating staff are given adequate training in trouble shooting to tackle minor failures enroute. The drivers have also been advised to record their observations of the performance of the locomotives so that the requisite attention is given in the loco-sheds.

6. Counselling and motivation of staff to accord top most priority for ensuring punctual running of trains.

Revision of payscales of station masters

2902. SHRI P.N. SIVA: Will the Minister of RAILWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the scales of pay of Station Masters were not revised above their subordinates such as Shunting Masters and Yard Masters;

(b) the action taken by the Ministry when the Station Masters called for a strike on 20.12.99; and what assurance was given by the Ministry; and

(c) whether Railway Board has come with a set of proposals to change the present mode of supply of uniforms, if so, what is the stand in granting the uniform allowance to Station masters at par with railway nursing staff?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH): (a) Pay scales allotted to Station Masters, Yard Masters and Shunting Masters are as per the recommendations of the V Central pay Commission as accepted by the Government. Yard Masters and Shunting Masters form a separate cadre with distinctly different channel of career progression and they are not subordinate to Station masters.

(b) After the receipt of the Strike Notice, conciliation proceedings were held by the Dy. Chief Labour Commissioner(C) , New Delhi and the stand of the Ministry on the demands of the Association was explained to him. No positive assurance was given on any of the demands raised by the Association.

(c) The Uniform Committee, 1995 set up to review the entire aspect of supply of uniform to eligible railway employees have recommended supply of cloth and stitching charges to certain public image categories, which also includes the category of Station Master. These recommendations are presently under consideration.